

# Maroons Maintain Indigenous Heritage

The Maroons are descendants of Arawak Indians and Africans who fought against the British in Jamaica in the late 1500's and early 1700's. Originally, Jamaica was colonized by the Spanish, who used the indigenous Arawak name for the island, Xaymaca, and enslaved the Arawak people. The Arawaks, known as a peaceful people, soon began to die of starvation, disease, and overwork, so the Spanish began to import slaves from the west coast of Africa, including Akan, Ibo, and Mandinka.

In 1655 the British invaded the island, and the Arawaks, Africans, and Spanish took to the interior hills to fight them, each for different reasons, of course. Finally, the Spanish gave up and fled, but the Arawaks and Africans continued fighting and became known as the Maroons, from the Spanish word *cimarrones*, meaning domesticated cattle that would escape and become wild and unmanageable.

There is no written history of the time from the Maroons' point of view, but from oral history it is known that the Arawaks and Africans helped each other. The Arawaks knew the land and taught the Africans what they knew. They intermarried and, under the leadership of Nanny, a guerrilla woman and spiritual leader, the Maroons made a peace treaty with the British in 1739, winning the right to freedom, self-government, and land.

Music is an integral part of the Maroon culture. One of the most honored instruments is the abeng, which is carved from the horn of a cow. The abeng, which only plays two notes, was used to communicate from hillside to hillside during the war, and it has a language that to this day is known only to the Maroons. It is never used for entertainment and is only blown freely at Christmas. One Maroon song is said to have been sung by Nanny after the Treaty of 1739 to urge the Maroons to unite and obey the treaty:

What a wonderful people  
behave o yo  
Many bloods  
behave o people  
This Nanny has called for.

Unfortunately, as with indigenous peoples in many countries around the world, the Maroons are being pushed to give up their culture and assimilate into Jamaican society. However, they have recently mobilized into a

*Colonel M. L. Wright of the Accompong Maroons playing the gumbé drum.*



Photo: Folkways Records

new federation and opened a cultural center in the eastern part of the island. In a recent letter, Roy Nigerian Harris, leader of the Young Maroons, says, "We seek support to assist our music, our poetry, our sports, our religion, and also our drama. At the moment, we are lacking funds, but our heritage is very rich, and there is a lot owed to us. We are seeking sponsors, who would have a lot to gain. If cultural tours with lectures could be arranged, great."

The Maroons can be contacted at The Maroons Cultural Centre, 12 Harbour Street, Port Antonio, Jamaica, Xaymaca, WI. In the United States, I can be reached c/o 360 62nd Street, Oakland, CA 94618. Music of the Maroons is available on Folkways Records, 43 W. 61st St., N.Y., N.Y. 10023.

—Randi Kristensen

## Caribs From Three Groups Meet In Dominica

Throughout the Caribbean there is an increasing awareness of indigenous concerns. According to the newspaper *Iere*, Carib representatives from Belize, St. Vincent and Dominica met in the spring in Dominica and called for more governmental recognition of Carib culture and identity. Like the Maroons in Jamaica, Caribs are descended from Indians and Africans who banded together in resistance to colonial European society.

Caribs living in Dominica maintain a local government Carib Council headed by the Carib Chief, who is elected directly by the people, according to tradition. However, the representative from St. Vincent at the conference spoke of the lack of such structures on his island and expressed concern about the disappearance of the culture of St. Vincent's estimated 5,600 Caribs. "We would like when the gap is filled and we are together as one people," he said. Another conference is planned on St. Vincent next year with the theme "Caribbean Indigenous Revival."



## AOTEAROA

# Maori Delegation Visits United States

*In June a delegation of seven Maori from Aotearoa (also known as New Zealand) traveled to the United States. They were hosted in the San Francisco Bay Area by Women of All Red Nations and the International Indian Treaty Council. Hinewhare Harawira of the Wailangi Action Committee told SAIIC:*

We have about 3.5 million people in Aotearoa and 300,000 are Maori. We are fighting for our independence.

We don't now have control of our lands. And one thing we find important as a first step in our independence is the taking back of our lands. The way we want to do it is not by

